

2250
ECCLESIASTICAL COVENANTING :

A

S E R M O N ;

CONTAINING

SOME REMARKS ON THE EXPECTED UNION OF THE
ASSOCIATE AND GENERAL ASSOCIATE SYNODS.

BY

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S E R M O N.

PSALM lxxvi. 11. "Vow and pay unto the Lord your God."

PSALM l. 14. "Pay thy vows unto the most High."

ISAIAH lvi. 6, 7. "Also the sons of the stranger that join themselves to the Lord, and take hold of my covenant, even them will I bring to my holy mountain."

SOLOMON says "better that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay."* But the same spirit that was in him commands us by the mouth of Asaph to "vow" as well as "pay unto the Lord our God." We know that the dictates of the Divine Spirit cannot be contradictory, and that Scripture being all true is necessarily consistent in all its parts. We are thus led to conclude that the two passages already quoted, do not speak of vows of the same kind. And in Scripture there are examples of vows very different in their nature and necessity—of some which we are not enjoined to make,

* Ecc. v. 5.

but which if made in a right spirit, and from proper motives, may find acceptance with God as free will-offerings, and which when made, the very nature of a vow obliges us to perform : and of others which we are bound in duty to God to make and to pay, and without which we can have no place among his people. Of the former kind there are numerous instances under the Old Testament. Though Hannah prayed that she might have a man-child, she was under no necessity of declining to educate him at home in her husband's house ; but she vowed a vow, promising, that she would give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and that he should be educated before the Lord in Shiloh. The vow of Jephthah, and the oath, vow, or curse (as it is called) of Saul that he and all his people would abstain from food till the evening of the day on which God avenged them of their enemies, were of the same kind. The vow of Ananias and Sapphira under the New Testament to dedicate the whole price of their land to the support and propagation of the gospel, and the prosperity of the Church, is another. The Apostle said, "Whiles it remained was it not thine own ? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power ?" * And the melancholy catastrophe which followed shewed that it had been much better for them not to have vowed such a vow, than after having made it, to attempt eluding the payment. The heart rending consequences which followed the observance of Jephthah's vow, which were avoided only by the breach of Saul's, and which followed the breach of that of

* Acts v. 4.

Ananias, shew that men should be very cautious of making vows which God has not expressly required at their hands.—But there are vows which we are commanded to make as well as pay, in which the saints rejoice, and which they count it a matter of thanksgiving to have lying on them. “Thy vows are upon me O God: I will render praises unto thee”*. These must be, not the sacrificing of an animal more than required by the law, nor the abstaining from food, (especially when the taking of it as in Saul’s case might have contributed to invigoration, increased activity, and perseverance in duty) nor the consecration of a larger proportion of our worldly substance than God requires to religious uses: but the taking hold of his covenant, and giving ourselves to him, and our goods to the support of his Institutions, and the relief of our necessitous brethren, in such proportion as his word requires, in our circumstances. We are not to halt between two opinions, but to vow to the mighty God saying we will be for thee and not for another. We cannot err when we follow his word in the matter of our vows: and if our vowing can lay us under additional obligations to what is right, and furnish additional motives to what is (in itself) *duty*, so much the better for us: his commandment is life and we should consider every new motive to duty, as an addition to our privileges, and thank God for having led to exercise which brings them near and retains them ever present in our minds. God recognises them only as his saints “who have made

* Psalm lvi. 12.

a covenant with him by sacrifice.”* To this kind of vowing we mean to confine your attention at present. And shall consider,

I. The nature of such vows.

II. The matter of them, or the duties to which they bind us. And

III. Mention some motives exciting you to pay your vows.

I. We remark 1st, That God has graciously condescended to receive some of the race of Adam into a covenant relation to himself, or in other words to give his people a covenant. That there is a covenant subsisting between God and the church all admit ; and also that this covenant is made and proposed or given to the church by God ; for it is presumptuous and blasphemous to suppose that any covenant made by man could be binding on God. It would be derogatory from the dignity, and unbecoming the glorious majesty of the Sovereign of the Universe, to accede as a party to any stipulations of a creature the work of his hands. The covenant of works made with man in his original state and with all reasonable creatures, was not framed by the creatures, nor was any article of it stipulated for by them but wholly given in the form of a law by God. And the covenant of Grace by which we have deliverance from the guilt and punishment,

* Psalm. l. 5.

and also from the power and practice of sin, by which we see the serpent overcome, all the mournful effects of his fatal seduction removed, and an entrance opened for us into a more abundant enjoyment of life than that which our first parents forfeited by sin, so far from being arranged or modified by the wisdom and prudence of the creature, was made in eternity with him who came in the fulness of time, to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself. The saints are indeed brought by the Spirit to accede personally to this covenant made with their surety, and find every article deeply to concern their interest, and the whole of it in their favour. But though it is always in their hearts and often in their mouths, we never hear them calling it a covenant which they have made with God, but always a covenant which *God hath made* with them. “Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant ordered in all thing and sure.”* In the promise of the seed of the woman to bruise the head of the serpent, this covenant was revealed to Adam soon after sin entered: it was afterward confirmed with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, successively, and again with David, and in short with all the saints whether in ancient times or in latter ages.

On this sure and broad basis have been erected several particular and supplementary covenants which God has given his church in the succession of ages. Of these the Abrahamic, the Sinaitic and the new or Christian covenants are examples. The

* 2 Sam. xxiii. 5,

last two we are accustomed to call dispensations : but in Scripture they are called the two covenants.* As soon as the visible church was erected into a public, associated, organised body, she was not only under the covenant of grace, but had also the Sinaitic covenant with all its peculiarities given her. In the writings of Jeremiah, God speaks to the Jews in that age, of the covenant which he made with their Fathers in the day that he took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.† In this covenant he gave a constitution with statutes and ordinances to the church.

And besides this, he speaks also in the same passage of making with the church in the days of the Messiah, another, a new, and better, covenant. From this the apostle justly reasons that in speaking of another as a new covenant, he maketh that old, and concludes that what decayeth and waxeth old may be expected to vanish away. He tells us also that by the coming of Christ it was removed ; and a new covenant given the church, conveying to her a new constitution, laws and ordinances. And he repeatedly congratulates his hearers on the happy change. The old was a law of commandments in ordinances, a yoke which neither they nor their fathers were able to bear, under which the church was in bondage with her children; but the new is a better covenant, in which the Son makes us free, and we are free indeed; in which God says, I will be your God, ye shall be my people, and without any burdensome yoke of cere-

* Gal. iv. 24. and Heb. viii. 13.

† Jer. xxxi. 32.

monious observances requires us to worship him in the few simple institutions which Christ hath commanded. And both partake so much of the nature of a Testament that every one who takes the benefit of their privileges, thereby places himself under all their obligations. You cannot inherit the goods of a testator without becoming bound to all the obligations originally lying on his estate, and to all those which he has specified in the testament.

2. All right religious vowing or covenanting on the part of men consists in openly taking hold of that particular covenant or constitution under which God has placed the church in their day. In covenanting we promise nothing in our strength ; for we take hold of God's covenant as a whole, and not only engage to the duties which it enjoins, but also claim and rely on the grace which it promises. The covenanting of the Israelites in the wilderness consisted not in any covenant of their making, (for to such a covenant God would not, and could not have acceded as a party,) but in receiving the covenant which God there made with them. Their words were, "all that the Lord our God hath said will we do"*: and in thus implicitly receiving the covenant promulged by him they "avouched the Lord to be their God." And all the subsequent covenantings of God's people under the Old Testament viz. in the days of Asa, in those of Josiah, and at their return from Babylon, were but so many instances in which they confessed and lamented their apostasy, and again

* Exod. xxvi. 7.

took hold of the covenant made with their fathers at Sinai. It could not be the making of a new covenant : it was but the renewal of an old friendship : and this was done by the confession and submission of the party by whose unfaithfulness the friendship had been violated. The parties were the same ; and there were no new articles introduced into the contract. The church confessing her errors returned to the plighted husband of her youth ; and solemnly declared that henceforth she would adhere to the covenant which he made with her when he espoused her in the wilderness. Could we suppose a new covenant made between God and the church at those times, it would lead not only to the absurdity that God became bound as a party to a covenant framed by mortal men, but also to the conclusion that the dispensation of grace and constitution of the church were changed, or at least modified on each of these occasions. But one who cannot err tells that the dispensation remained the same, and that the law continued at least until John, the shining harbinger of the Gospel day. To shew that the Israelites in their covenanting only declared anew their adherence to the Sinaitic covenant which they admitted was still binding on them, we might only have referred you to the pages of the sacred volume in which these transactions are recorded. They read the book of the covenant which Moses wrote and read to their fathers in the wilderness ; and though the words in which they engaged to adhere to it varied, (as might be expected on the different occasions,) yet the substance of their engagement every time amounted to the declaration of their fa-

thers, "all that the Lord our God hath spoken will we do, and be obedient." Thus it is said of Josiah, "the king went up into the house of the Lord and all the men of Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great: and he read in their ears all the words of *the book of the covenant* which had been found in the house of the Lord, and the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments, and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart, and all their soul, to perform the *words of this covenant* that were written in *this book* and all the people stood to the covenant.*"

And the covenanting of the first Christians (though they were not all collected into one assembly, and though in some other circumstances, it was not so formally gone about, as that of the Israelites in the wilderness,) consisted in receiving the new and better covenant given to the church in their day, in taking the Lord to be their God, and "giving their own selves to the Lord"† as his people. And the covenanting of the Waldenses, and of the first reformers from Popery in this and other countries, was merely a renewed taking hold of the same covenant, and of the ecclesiastical constitutions and laws which it promulges, in opposition to the apostasy and idolatry, the tyrannical yoke and absurd ceremonies of Rome. It was only the ingrafting of some branches

* 2. Kings xxiii. 2, 3.

† 2. Cor. viii. 5.

into the same tree from which they had for a time been separated by the usurpation and violent procedure of the man of sin. It bore no analogy to the covenanting of the ancient church in the wilderness ; for that would lead to the unscriptural conclusion that the Church has received a new constitution, and been placed under a new dispensation every time she has engaged in covenanting : but the exercise and deeds of our ancestors on these occasions had an exact correspondence with those of the Israelitish church in the days of Asa, Josiah and Nehemiah. On these occasions the Israelitish church returned from her apostasy and declared anew her adherence to the covenant given her in the wilderness : and on those mentioned in the history of the New Testament Church our forefathers returned, took hold of the Covenant or Testament given to the church in the days of the Apostles, and solemnly said and swore that renouncing the errors and idolatry of Rome they would henceforth adhere to that alone in doctrine, worship, discipline and government. They saw and avowed that the covenant of which they solemnly declared their approbation and to which they vowed their subjection had a descending obligation on the followers of Christ alway even to the end of the world.

But if any of them omitted to declare their approbation and espousal of the whole constitution of this covenant, in its laws as well as privileges, or if they superadded any thing of their own, inconsistent with its Divine constitution, they did amiss, and in

so far their covenanting was sinful, and could be obligatory neither on themselves nor their posterity. What Moses said of the old is equally true of the New and better covenant, “ viz. you shall not add thereto nor diminish from it.” Our taking hold of this covenant binds us to the Lord as our God, to Christ as our Saviour, and to one another as his followers and members of his body. Men may make covenants with one another about civil and even religious matters, (as for example the Holy League of the Guises in France for the destruction of all the Reformed Churches) distinct from, or even inconsistent with the covenant which God has given the Church. But there can be no covenanting in which God is a party, or which can bind us to him except that of receiving the covenant which he has made, which he offers to us in the gospel, and which binds all his people to one another by their common relation to Christ their head. Nor ought we to bind ourselves together by any tie which this covenant does not recognise. But in taking hold of this, we bind ourselves to be dutiful to God as our Heavenly Father, and are confederated to the other members of the family as our brethren.*

8. That therefore all true Christians are under vows or covenant obligations to God. Without taking hold of God’s covenant of Grace there can be no true Christianity: and all who approach God in any other way are building on sand, and trusting to refuges of lies. Of this covenant ratified and

* See Note A.

confirmed by the death of Christ all his saints take hold by faith : and in taking hold of it, and receiving its spiritual privileges, they come under all the obligations lying on *them* who are under law to Christ. They become subject to the authority of him as their head, and thus bound to the constitution and laws which he has given the church.

4. That all church members are openly and avowedly under covenant obligations or vows to God. All Christians are covenanters; and if there are Christians who are not church members, the only difference between them and those who are, is that they act like a man among strangers who will not tell whence he is, but is ashamed of his country, and disowns his countrymen, or like a soldier who in the presence of an enemy throws away his regimental badges, and denies his king and his general : whereas the faithful Christian in joining the visible church avows himself to have a citizenship in heaven, to be a subject of the crucified Jesus, a soldier of Zion's king. That they do so in giving their accession to the church,* in sitting down at the Lord's table, or as parents in receiving baptism, the seal that the Lord will be the God of their children as well as of themselves, must be evident to all who have considered the nature and import of these transactions. All who have made these vows should be careful to perform them. They are bound to nothing but what is required of all gospel hearers: but their own declaration and promise confirm and

* See Note B.

strengthen the obligations, and furnish new motives to their fulfilment.

5. That there are circumstances in which it is our duty to confirm by oath our profession of adherence to God's covenant. It is the duty of all men to speak the truth at all times ; but circumstances sometimes occur in which it is moral duty to confirm their testimony by an oath. " An oath for confirmation is to men an end of all strife."* When, about some matter of importance there is strife between man and man, one affirming and another denying, but neither able to lead satisfactory proof of what he says, then it is the duty of the judge to direct that a solemn appeal be made to the Searcher of hearts, the God of truth, and Avenger of falsehood, by taking the oath of one of the parties. And this terminates the strife : there the matter ought to rest. And may not circumstances occur in which it is a duty to confirm our declaration of adherence to God's covenant by an oath ? The covenant about which we are to swear is not a trivial matter. God sware to it. And as he could swear by no greater he sware by himself. To Abraham and to David he sware that he would be faithful to what he promised in this covenant, He sware by his own self-existence " as I live, saith the Lord," by his faithfulness, " I will not lie, "by his holiness," and " by his right hand and his holy arm," or his omnipotence, appealing to these essential attributes of his nature, or pledging them for the truth of what he had promised. And

* Heb. vi. 16.

can we decline to confirm by a solemn oath our adherence to the same covenant when circumstances require it? No, God's saints have done it both to the former and to the new or better covenant. This public swearing to our profession is what we generally mean when we speak of covenanting. In 2 Chron. xv. 12. 14, we read that after Asa "had put away the abominable idols out of the land, he and the people sware to the Lord, to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart, and with all their soul—and all Judah rejoiced at the oath." The same thing was done under Josiah, and at the return from Babylon.

Our fathers in this country also when they put away Romish idolatry, swore in the *National Covenant* that they would observe the statutes and ordinances which were given to the church by Christ. And they did the same in the *Solemn League and Covenant* when they renounced and abjured prelacy and the superstitious rites of England. The first seceders also sware to the Lord in a bond suited to their circumstances when they forsook their erroneous doctrine, patronage, restraint on their ministerial freedom, lax communion and Erastianism, prevalent in the Established Church of Scotland.

Now though it is a duty to confirm our testimony by oath in civil matters, when circumstances render it necessary, yet to do so at all times is a sin prohibited in the third precept of the decalogue. And though it is our duty when circumstances in pro-

vidence require it, to confirm our religious profession by oath, yet swearing about this may not be at all times proper more than about other things. The present Testimony of the General Associate Synod speaks repeatedly of the *seasonableness* of this duty, admitting that it is not equally proper at all times. And it would be very difficult to particularise before hand all the times and circumstances, when an oath may be found requisite to confirm a man's declaration whether about his secular affairs or his religious profession. Much evidently depends on his previous character and circumstances. But this ought always to be remembered, that although in religious vowing we take hold of a covenant which binds us to God as well as to our fellow-christians, yet an oath can never be necessary or in any way advantageous to the former; for he sees the heart, and can have no additional assurance of our sincerity by any deed of this kind: but our oath is necessary to the latter in certain circumstances, and highly useful in encouraging their hearts by removing all suspicion of our falsehood, and assuring them of our truth in professing adherence to the New and better Testament. It is therefore eminently called for when our previous circumstances or habits have been such that they render our present profession justly suspected. And if we look to Scripture or the practice of the church, we will find that covenanting has always been practised and eminently blessed and useful when God's people were returning from apostasy, putting away idols which they had long adored, and submitting anew to that covenant which they had long despised. Such a re-

turning and putting away of “abominable idols” is mentioned at all the times of covenanting recorded under the Old Testament. And when Peter was restored after denying his Lord, he not only made a triple declaration of his love to the Saviour corresponding to his thrice repeated denial of him, but made that declaration of love with a solemn appeal to his Lord himself, the Searcher of hearts, as knowing all things, an appeal therefore equivalent to an oath. And such a return took place in Scotland when the National Covenant, and when the Solemn League were first sworn, and also (though we do not say that it was from a society holding errors and corruptions of such magnitude as those renounced on the former occasions) when the bond of the first seceders was sworn. The practice of our fathers then, and especially that of the Old Testament Church lead us to conclude, that this duty is eminently seasonable, not so much when we see defects in others to point out and deplore, as when we ourselves are renouncing and deploring our own errors, and returning to maintain God’s covenant in greater purity. Were a number of Papists in a body to profess to renounce the church of Rome as Antichrist, and to espouse the true Reformed Religion in doctrine, worship, Presbyterian church government and discipline, would not an oath be necessary to satisfy you that they were sincere? and was not this precisely the case with our reforming ancestors, who had not long emerged from the smoke of spiritual Sodom, when they bound themselves by a solemn oath and vow not to return thither, but to abide stedfastly in the true Christian faith and reli-

gion, revealed to the world by the preaching of the blessed evangel?

6. That the covenant which God made with the church, and of which our fathers in these lands took hold is binding on us. After the Israelites had overcome Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, and were about to pass over Jordan, when excepting Moses, Caleb, and Joshua, there was not an individual among them who had been alive, or at least who had been at the years of maturity, when the covenant was given at Sinai; we find them saying, "The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even with us who are all of us here alive this day."* Their posterity in subsequent generations are charged with the breach of this covenant; and that is assigned as the reason why the Lord delivered them into the hand of the King of Assyria, who "put them in Halah and Habor by the river Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes."† The prophet Jeremiah charges them with the same sin.‡ How frequently are the Israelites charged in Scripture with transgressing God's covenant, or breaking the covenant made with their fathers in Sinai? But are they once blamed for neglecting or breaking the covenant of Asa, Josiah, or Nehemiah. No, theirs was the same covenant, or rather a returning to the same covenant which had been made with their fathers in Horeb. And this is the covenant which Scripture

* Deut. v. 2, 3. † 2 Kings xvii. 15. and xviii. 12. ‡ Jer. xxxi. 32.

teaches us had a descending obligation, and was binding on the church till the New and better covenant was given by Christ.

In like manner when we speak of the descending obligation of the covenant of our fathers under the New Testament, we should regard the Christians in the Apostolic age as (ecclesiastically) our fathers, and look back to the new covenant made with the church in their days, and which is and will be binding on the church alway to the end of the world. Any subsequent covenanting of our intermediate fathers is to be acknowledged by us only in so far as it was a return to, and taking hold of that covenant. And this we think was substantially done in the covenanting of our ancestors according to the flesh, in these lands. Some have indeed scrupled much about the clause in the solemn League, promising to defend the rights and liberties of the kingdoms, and the king's person and authority. But Christ's covenant requires us to seek the good of all men, and be subject to the higher powers; and though we would by no means justify every expression on that subject used in the Solemn League, yet we think that substantially it was only an engagement in the strength of grace to perform the duties which Christ required of them to those in lawful authority, as well as to their fellow subjects. In that deed they made no new covenant which could bind them or us to God, they only said that they themselves would adhere to and would endeavour by instruction and a transmission of ordinances in purity, to make their posterity adhere to the new

and better covenant, which independent of any deed of man, was binding on them and us, and all gospel hearers.

7. That from the engagements of our ancestors we are under an additional obligation to adhere to God's covenant. The privileges which they have transmitted to us, and their example infer an obligation. But we would rest this doctrine on the simple principle, that though a man is bound to what is right by the moral Law, yet he may be additionally bound to it by his own promise and engagement, and his violation of the Law greatly aggravated by that consideration: that a society civil or ecclesiastical is one complex person, bound by its engagements even after the persons who made them are removed: and therefore that in so far as we and our ancestors can be supposed to constitute the same ecclesiastical body their engagement to adhere to, and observe Christ's new covenant, must be binding on us.

II. The matter of our vows or covenant engagements.

These may be expressed in one word, viz. Christianity. In making or swearing them, men say that they will not be unsteadfast or perfidious in God's covenant, but faithful persevering Christians. For the farther illustration of this we remark;

1. They bind us to cleave to the Lord as our God, and to Christ as our Saviour. When the Lord

speaks of himself as a God to his people, he represents himself as the source of felicity, and the fountain of every blessing to them. Therefore “ he is not a God of the dead but of the living.” And in taking him to be your God, you renounce as vain all hopes of finding satisfaction to your souls in earthly things, and say in the language of the Psalmist, “ God is my portion for ever.”* If at any time you catch your minds going after vanity, or seeking a portion in things that perish, you are bound to reprove yourselves and say “ return unto thy rest O my soul.” You will account it your most noble attainment, your greatest riches, and your highest happiness, to be “ heirs of God.” You will claim an interest in God as your inheritance and the portion of your cup, in his wisdom for your guidance, in his omnipotence for your defence, and in all his attributes as engaged in your behalf. For in this covenant he gives himself to you ; “ I will be their God.”

This covenant binds you also to cleave to Christ as your Saviour. You can have no interest in God, nor communion with him, but through the one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus. You must not only rely on his atonement for acceptance with God, but also receive his doctrine with the meekness of little children, and yield up yourselves and all that is yours as his own property, to the disposal of his all-wise providence, and as willing servants, who will make it your business to

* Psalm lxxiii. 26.

fulfil whatever his pleasure is. It is a great mistake to suppose that preaching the gospel is confined to an exhibition of Christ in his priestly office; or that he believes the gospel who relies in fancied security on the atonement of Christ, but gives no attention, honour, or obedience, to him as a prophet and king. That man is a deceiver of his own soul; and his religion is vain. You must not only receive Christ Jesus the Lord in his threefold office, but also walk in him. God says if any man draw back my soul shall have no pleasure in him. That this continued attachment to the Lord as our God, and to Christ as our Saviour, has been considered by God's people in every age as an essential part of their obligations and vows to God, appears from all the public deeds in which they avowed their approbation of God's covenant, and engaged themselves to adhere to it. At present I shall quote that only which is used by the Secession. The words are "we desire to take hold with our whole heart of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the only propitiation for our sins; of his word as our perfect and only rule of faith and practice, &c.; and of his spirit as our only guide to lead us into all truth, and to keep us in the way of God's commandments." If any think that this does not avow in a manner sufficiently explicit our subjection to the kingly power and authority of Christ, he has only to read the clause which follows, "we shall by the grace of God continue and abide in the profession, faith, and obedience of the true Reformed religion, in doctrine, worship, Presbyterian church government, and discipline;" and he will find that a subjection to this au-

thority, instead of being omitted, is the chief part of that bond. And in all this there is nothing engaged to, but what God hath enjoined his people to observe alway to the end of the world.

2. They bind us to labour for the advancement of knowledge, in ourselves and others. Every church judges some measure of knowledge as well as regularity of practice necessary in those who are admitted to full membership. Scripture also considers knowledge as a prerequisite to right covenanting : “ thou shalt swear the Lord liveth in truth and in judgement” as well as “ in righteousness.”* As the most enlightened see but darkly while on earth, and as knowledge is necessary to a performance of the duties enjoined in God’s covenant, so in avowing our adherence to it we bind ourselves to use all lawful means for encreasing our knowledge. As God made us reasonable beings, we must consecrate all our faculties to him, and give him a reasonable service. Ignorance is the mother of error and superstition. And though all Christians have so much knowledge as to entitle them to be called children of light, yet we must not rest in the first principles, but go on to the higher doctrines of the word of God ; we must not use milk alway, but accustom ourselves to stronger food. We must seek to enlighten ourselves more and more by studying the word of God, and so far as our influence extends, so far as we can shine by holding forth the word of life, to advance the church with which we are connected, and society in which

* Jerem. iv. 12.

we live, to higher degrees of the Light of Life ; and contribute our mite for sending the light into the dark places of the earth, and converting the habitations of cruelty into dwellings of the righteous, where praises shall be heard to our God, and men shall dwell together as brethren.

3. They bind us to maintain pure and entire, all the ordinances of Divine worship. If we regard the covenant of God as given to the church in her corporate capacity, the maintaining and observing of these ordinances will appear the chief, or at least the most prominent obligation which it lays on her. They are appended to the covenant as the seal of Deity to the deed, to assure us that he owns the deed as his, and will make every word of promise which it contains good in the experience of his people. To all therefore who rely on the covenant itself, these seals will be precious. Accordingly our ancestors in the reforming and seceding periods did not omit these when they returned and avowed their adherence to God's covenant. They considered themselves as bound by it to observe all things whatsoever Christ had commanded, and to transmit them as a sacred trust to us and other generations of their posterity who were then unborn. Every one who has tasted the sweet consolations, or experienced the high improvement which God's people derive from these ordinances, or who has proper respect to the authority which instituted them, must feel them dear to his heart, and gladly contribute to their being maintained in unsullied purity till Christ come again. He will say, " If I

forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning: if I do not remember thee let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.”*

4. They bind us to seek union with those who entertain similar views of God’s covenant, and whose practice also is near akin to our own. There is not a more odious character among men, than that of him who sows or perpetuates discord among brethren. Christ says, “a new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another: by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another.”† Accordingly the first Christians who received the new covenant from the Lord, all remained in one communion, though differing greatly in their views of the ceremonial law, and in their practice concerning its institutions. Accordingly our ancestors in renouncing prelacy, and swearing to God in the Solemn League, united with the English and Irish Presbyterians, who at that time differed from them in many of their practices, and forms, both in church government, (as the Classes and Tiers in England, were unlike the Presbyteries and Assemblies in Scotland) and also in their modes of public worship. Still these different bodies united as brethren, held communion with one another by an interchange of ministers and members, and joined together in swearing the same solemn oath, the preamble of which was, “We noblemen, &c., mi-

* Psalm cxxxvii. 5, 6.

† John xiii. 34, 35.

nisters of the gospel, and commons of all sorts, in the kingdoms of Scotland, England, and Ireland—being of *one reformed religion*,” and the first engagement in which is, “that we shall endeavour to bring the churches of God in the three kingdoms to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion, *Confession of Faith*, form of church government, directory for worship, and catechising.” They found themselves “of one reformed religion,” united in communion, and in swearing the Solemn League, and in it engaged to draw up their “Confession of Faith,” Form of Church Government and Directory for worship, afterwards. The Solemn League was sworn by many of all ranks in the three kingdoms in 1643, the year in which the Westminster Assembly met. It is true that that assembly continued sitting till the Confession of Faith, Catechisms, Form of Church Government and Directory for Worship were finished, but that was not till 1647, four years after all the Presbyterians in the three kingdoms had sworn the Solemn League. It is not our intention at present to justify or condemn the order of procedure which our fathers followed in this matter. We only mention facts. But what powers of discernment, or rather of perversion must they have, who are continually repeating that an union between the two great branches of the Secession at present, would be a violation of that deed, whose words and spirit shew that it was meant as a bond of Union among all Presbyterians in Britain and Ireland? Indeed it was the only bond or *Basis* by which they were united for four years, before the Confession of Faith was approved and enacted.

The oath which separated the two bodies in the Secession is now removed, and what but party spirit can keep them asunder? All who oppose their union are violating both the letter and the spirit of the public engagements of our ancestors.

In the bond used in the Secession, “ we promise and swear to promote and advance this our *covenanted conjunction*, (that is the same, covenanted in the Solemn League,) and uniformity in Religion, Confession of Faith &c.; and to encourage and strengthen one another’s hands in pursuing the end and design of this our solemn oath and covenant.” Let the public therefore look to the letter and spirit of these engagements and judge whether they who favour or they who oppose the presently proposed union, can with the greater shew of reason be accused of perjury or covenant violation. Indeed all right covenanting among Christians necessarily binds them to seek union with one another, where it can be attained without a denial of Christ. For the Testament that he gave the Church lays this obligation upon us. In the Lord’s Supper his people are all declared to be children of the same family, one bread, and one body. And the chief end in our swearing to it is to promote union with our fellow Christians, by assuring them of our sincerity and readiness to co-operate with them in promoting the ends of the covenant.

5. You are bound to labour for bringing strangers and enemies to submit to Christ, and join with you in embracing his covenant. Every Christian

prays that Christ's kingdom may come, that his reign of grace may be extended, and the number of his willing subjects increased. But you cannot pray for any thing in faith, you cannot consistently pray for it at all, unless you at the same time diligently use all lawful means for its accomplishment. One of the obligations of the covenant lying on the church since the days of Christ is to see that the gospel be preached in all the world, to every creature. Accordingly our Fathers in their covenanting, specified England and Ireland, the countries nearest them, and in which their energies were likely to have the greatest effect ; as places in which they would co-operate with the native Presbyterians, with whom, as we saw they united on the basis of that covenant, in promoting among all classes the pure Presbyterian government, discipline, doctrine and worship. And we are bound to seek the same end by all means consistent with liberty of conscience, not in England and Ireland only, but in all countries of the earth. Let your conversation, your example and all your influence be employed in disseminating the truth, and extending the kingdom of our Saviour, till all kindreds of the earth submit, and do him homage.

III. Some reasons exciting to pay your vows.

1. Remember the many obligations under which we are to perform the duties to which we have engaged. We are bound by our own vows and declarations. None, not even the most sceptical, can doubt the obligation of our own personal engage-

ments. We have made them, in acceding to the church, in sitting down at the Lord's table, those of us who are parents in receiving on our children that seal of the covenant which confirms the promise, "I will be the God of your seed," and a few of us in declaring our fixed adherence to the covenant by a solemn oath. A breach of faith to our fellow men is an iniquity to be punished by the judges, but the same perfidy to the God of Truth must be much more heinous and aggravated. None who has opened his mouth to the Lord can with any thing like faith or integrity go back.

But we are also bound by the deeds of our ancestors to be stedfast and faithful in the Covenant of God. Some have attempted to prove this from the covenant of Joshua and the Israelites in his day with the Gibeonites, which was acknowledged to be binding, and the infraction of it punished in an awful manner in succeeding generations. But that was merely a man's covenant, a covenant between men about natural and civil matters : and we do not see how it can have so strong a bearing as some have supposed upon a religious ecclesiastical covenant between man and his maker. And if some human covenants about natural or civil matters are binding on posterity, we could mention thousands of them, and even some ordained by God, which bind none but the individuals who make them. For instance, none ever supposed that the marriage covenant between a man and his wife, could bind any other after he was gone to be a loving and faithful husband to that woman. If any other become bound to her

it is by the dissolution and not the obligation of this, and by the making of a new covenant. Therefore the fact that one covenant is binding on posterity furnishes no conclusive argument that another must be so. But we have said already, that he who receives the benefits or privileges of a covenant, thereby puts himself under its obligations. And if our ancestors transmitted privileges to us, might they not convey obligations in connection with the privileges? But the foundation on which this descending obligation of the vows of the church chiefly (if not exclusively) rests is her unity and perpetuity. The Solemn League and National Covenant were not the vows of our ancestors individually, but of the church, the ecclesiastical body of which they were members ; and therefore are binding on us in so far as we and the society which came under them are one. If the society is one, the more frequently she declares her resolution of being faithful to God, in keeping pure and entire his worship, and the ordinances appointed in his word, the more strongly is she bound ; and her sin in neglecting these duties must be aggravated by the breach of her repeated promises.

But let it never be forgotten, that we are bound to the performance of these duties by obligations to which all that results from our own engagements, or those of our fathers, bear no more proportion than 'the spiders most attenuated thread,' to chains of adamant, and in which they are merged and lost as a drop of rain in the boundless ocean: we mean the infinite obligations resulting from the unlimited authority of Jehovah. God hath spoken, and we as

creatures are bound to obey. In scripture God does not speak of the guilt of breaking his covenant as consisting in violating our own engagements, or those of our fathers, but as lying chiefly if not solely in rebellion against his supreme authority. He does not blame the Israelites for breaking the engagements to the covenant made in the days of Asa and Josiah, or even the promise of their fathers in the wilderness "all that the Lord hath said will we do:"* in this they were verily guilty; but violation of human engagements was not to be compared with the guilt of violating a covenant made and enjoined on them by Divine authority. The former obligation was absorbed in the latter. God calls it the "covenant that *I made* with their fathers," and adds, "which, *my covenant*, they brake," reminding us that the evil of covenant violation, as of all other sins, lies chiefly in its opposition to the Divine authority. Like Adam they "brake God's covenant by refusing to walk in his law."† Of our negligence of the duties prescribed in the New covenant we may say to God, "Against thee, thee only have we sinned."‡

When we think of this, does it not seem idle to dispute about the nature and the name of the obligations lying on us from the deeds of our ancestors? We are bound to the covenant of God by his own authority: and it is scarcely conceivable that any who disregards the authority of God, will be restrained by the covenanting of his fathers.

* Exod. xxiv. 7. † Psalm lxxviii. 10. ‡ See Note C.

This would be something more strange than to strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. The comparatively small influence which this obligation has on practice shews the futility of stirring up unchristian feelings by disputing about the name by which it should be called. We cannot help asserting that every religious tenet must be estimated by its practical influence in relieving the guilty by leading them to Christ; comforting the afflicted by the hopes of a better and enduring portion in heaven; reviving the lukewarm apathy of the indifferent, by infusing the same mind that was also in Christ Jesus, who resolutely drank the cup which the Father presented him, and finished the work given to him to do; and exciting all classes to greater diligence in the cause of God and Truth, by promoting that love to God and his image, which is the fulfilling of the law. And a man may as well boast of the excellency of his orchard though it bear no fruit, as talk of the value of what he may call religious principles, while (he admits) they have no influence on practice. Remember then that you are bound by the infinite authority of God, the highest of all obligations, to do all the things of his covenant. He commands you to receive and keep his covenant, to take him as your God, and give yourselves to him as his people; to repent, believe in his Son whom he has sent, and observe all things whatsoever Christ hath commanded you.

2. Remember the many valuable blessings and privileges of the covenant. These are so connected with its obligations and duties, that you cannot

receive the former without becoming bound to the latter, nor neglect the latter without renouncing the former. If you know the privileges to be great and the blessings manifold, your esteem of them, and desire of enjoying the benefits and comforts which they convey, must stir you up to diligence in conforming to the obligations, and in discharging the duties. You cannot put asunder what God has joined. If you would have the Lord to be your God, you must give yourselves to him as his people. If you wish to sit down at the Lord's Table, you must preserve that external regularity of practice, without which the elders of the church could not admit you. If with the outward signs at that table you wish the thing signified, and would indeed eat of the things wherewith the atonement was made, you must come with faith, which is an act of the human mind, as well as the gift of God. If you wish the outward ordinances in purity, you must join them who are maintaining them in purity, and contribute your own share to that end. If you would see God you must seek to be pure in heart. Holiness is that without which no man can see the Lord. As the fire from heaven consumed the victim on the altar, so the full blaze of Divine glory is a consuming fire to sinful man. We see God only in proportion as our sin is taken away by the Spirit of holiness; and a fuller manifestation of his glory would destroy us. When the chosen and faithful Moses, wishing a visible manifestation of that dread Being who had conversed with him as familiarly as a man speaking face to face with his friend, said, "shew me I beseech thee thy glory," he was told

that he knew not what he was asking; that no man living in this state of imperfection and sin could sustain a full display of the Divine glory. “No man can see my face and live” was the reply; only what are called the back parts of Deity were discovered to Moses: and any thing farther he (as well as we) had to learn from a testimony in words. “He said I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee: &c. And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering and abundant in goodness and truth: keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin; and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.”* When the saints shall not have in, or about them, any thing that defileth, then and not till then shall the immediate glory of God and the Lamb be their light and the light of their city. The sinner never can bear and far less enjoy the splendour of Deity till his sin be taken away. The conclusion is, that on earth the Christian’s enjoyment of communion with God, generally bears a proportion to his personal sanctification. We would not be understood to mean that our personal holiness is at all taken into account when our legal title to acceptance with God is considered; but it is you see, absolutely necessary to our enjoyment of fellowship with him. Our claim to the inheritance

* Exodus xxxiii. 18. and xxxiv. 5, 6.

rests on our relation to Christ, for we are joint heirs with him, but holiness is absolutely necessary to meeten us for the actual possession. And to them whose souls follow hard after God, is it possible to suggest a stronger motive to "follow holiness, without which no man can see the Lord?"

If it were but a man's testament you could not take the benefit of its bequests without complying with its obligations. And according to the tenor of God's covenant and the nature of things, you cannot have happiness without holiness. You must labour in the vineyard, if you expect the reward. If you would attain the honour of the prize, you must not decline the fatigues of the race. If you wish to share the glory of the triumph, you must not be unfaithful to your king, desert the Captain of your salvation, or in any way shrink from the painful conflict with sin in yourselves, or your brethren; but fight the good fight. From this subject we may see,

1st, In what sense covenanting is, and ought to be a term of communion. The church requires every member to avow his approbation of, and adherence to God's covenant before his admission to the Lord's table: and his appearance at the Lord's table is a practical and more solemn repetition of the same declaration. And thus far (viz. as an avowed taking hold of God's covenant, by the observance of his ordinances) covenanting is, and has been a term of communion since God had a church in the world.

And what is called public covenanting, if ever it were done without an oath, would be saying no more to God, and giving no stronger assurance to men, than what every church member had previously done in assuming and maintaining his profession. But there are circumstances which render it the imperious duty of every church member, openly to confirm the sincerity of his profession by a solemn oath. And the question is, when in the judgment of the church such circumstances have occurred in providence, ought the performing of it to be a term of communion? When covenanting took place under the Old Testament, the elders of the people, their priests, rulers, and the body of the people in general, were present and joined in the oath, but we do not hear of them who were absent, (and there were some) being required to swear the same oath, or being excommunicated for their refusal. The oath by the priests, rulers, and majority, was considered as binding on the whole church; and though absent members were not required formally to swear, they were required to observe the oath, in maintaining the ordinances in purity. At the covenanting under Josiah we are told that "the king commanded all the people, saying, "Keep the passover unto the Lord your God as it is written in the book of this covenant."* And in the reign of Asa "they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul; *that whosoever would not seek the Lord*

* 2. Kings xxxiii. 21.

God of Israel, should be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman. And they sware, &c.”* It was a deed of the church, and therefore binding on all her members in that and every succeeding generation, till God himself abrogated the covenant to which they had sworn, by giving them a new and better one.

But our fathers in this country ordained “all the members of this kirk and kingdom,” to subscribe the National Covenant “under all ecclesiastical censure,” *see Act of Assembly, 1639, as prefixed to the National Covenant, in our common editions of the Westminster Confession of Faith.*

Perhaps their circumstances warranted this : but in the same act they mention that the Lords of his Majesty’s privy council, in compliance with their supplication had ordained by act of council all his Majesty’s lieges to subscribe the foresaid covenant. The same act concludes with a supplication to his Majesty’s high commissioner and the Estates of Parliament to ratify the same by their authority, and enjoin it under all civil pains. This supplication also was successful : and the act of Parliament appears on the next page ordaining and commanding “the said covenant to be subscribed by all his Majesty’s subjects of what rank and quality soever, under all civil pains.” Now we know that one striking

* 2. Chron. xv. 12. 15.

difference between the Sinaitic and the gospel covenant is that in the former God gave his people a civil as well as ecclesiastical constitution, while the latter establishes a kingdom wholly spiritual, not of this world, and interfering with the political institutions of the nations, only so far as to prohibit any thing in them hostile to morality and religion. The new covenant does not authorize that close conjunction between church and state which was sanctioned by the old : it recognises none as the subjects of the Messiah, but a willing people, guarantees liberty of conscience as the inalienable right of men, and therefore teaches us that as every man should be fully persuaded in his own mind, our ancestors did wrong in enforcing their Religious bond on all men by civil authority, and under all civil pains. In this we praise them not.

But to come nearer our own times the first Seceders bound themselves to God in a bond suited to their circumstances : and that bond both before and since the slight alterations made on it by the General Associate Synod in 1799, has been sworn by many individuals in many of the Seceding Congregations. But none supposes that ever that bond was enforced by civil authority; and we may safely affirm that the swearing of that bond never was required as a term of communion in the Secession, or the refusal of it punished by excommunication or any other ecclesiastical censure. The act of the Associate Presbytery in 1744, which seems to bear hard on *neglecters* and *shifTERS* of this duty was never

in that sense acted upon.* And in times like the present, and circumstances such as those of the Secession, there can be no doubt that much must be left to the consciences of individuals. To his own master every man standeth or falleth : and in this as well as in civil matters, it may sometimes be the duty of one man, when it is not that of another, to confirm what he says by an oath. If a man is compelled to take an oath, that must diminish all ground of confidence in his keeping of it. A church making the performing of this a term of communion, would be like a secular society decreeing that because an oath to confirm our word is sometimes necessary, every man who shall henceforth speak without swearing, shall be hanged. The Secession has on many occasions urged and excited but never compelled her members to swear to their profession. Nor has she ever been in circumstances which could at all have warranted her to do so. And we hesitate much about making any thing a term of ministerial which is not a term of Christian communion, except being ‘apt to teach,’ and other things which are requisite to the peculiar duties of the ministerial office.

2d, That a man should be fully persuaded in his own mind ere he swear to God and man about his religious profession. Solomon speaks of it as a snare and a dangerous thing after vows to make enquiry. And nothing can be more presumptuous than to vow and swear about any thing of which we are uncertain, and purpose still farther investigation. We

should finish the enquiry and have our minds fully persuaded, before we vow. But though a man be fully persuaded at the time, yet the duties engaged to in receiving God's covenant being important, he must necessarily enquire about their nature and the manner of performing them, and as on this and other accounts he is bound in the vow itself to grow in *knowledge* as well as grace, it is not impossible that he may change his mind. And in such a case we hesitate not to affirm that he is bound by his vow to maintain God's covenant according to his present views of it, and not according to those which he now sees to be mistaken. Were he to persist in maintaining any thing which he now sees to be without foundation in Scripture, it would be a direct violation of his engagement to take the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the word of God, the only rule of faith and manners. Nothing can be more preposterous, or more like ignorance and bigotry, than for men to plead their ordination, sacramental, or covenanting vows, as an argument against enquiry and searching the Scriptures. Are they conscious that their tenets will not stand the test of enquiry? Or do they think, that their vows to search the Scriptures bind them to shut the sacred volume forever, and exclude all additional light? But one great end in swearing to our profession is to assure others of our sincerity in holding the particular views of God's covenant which it expresses; and therefore if we change from these views, it is incumbent on us to make our change from them as public as the original declaration of our adherence to them. May God grant us the grace and privileges, and enable

us to fulfil the obligations and perform the duties of his new and better covenant, which is established on better promises and ordained in the hand of a Mediator. Amen.

NOTES.

NOTE A.—page 31.

That an avowed adherence to God's covenant, has been considered in every age as the substance of ecclesiastical covenanting appears from the deeds themselves, or bonds entered into on these occasions.

Thus in the bond used by the Waldenses, as published in Morland's History, and again published in the Christian Magazine, for May 1816, we find the following words, "We promise by an oath, to continue all in the profession of the true Christian Reformed Religion, which we have to this day embraced, which Religion consisteth in the believing in, and worshipping one only true God, and one only Head of the Church, and Mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus; and in the only rule of believing and living well, which is contained in the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, together with the two sacraments instituted by our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, namely Baptism and the Lord's Supper; promising according to the word, to yield obedience to all exterior order and discipline already established among us; and detesting all heresies and false doctrines which are contrary to this word of God, contained in the books of the Old and New Testaments."

The substance of the National Covenant of Scotland, and also of the Solemn League, is known to be an engagement to the same duties. They were thus understood by our reforming ancestors. When Mr.

William Veitch was asked by a committee of the council at Edinburgh, 1679, "Have you taken the covenant?" his answer was, "I judge myself obliged to covenant myself away to God, and frequently to renew it." The Judicial Testimony speaking of the Solemn League, says, "The matter of the covenant was all the precious things that are involved in pure religion, &c.; duties obligatory upon every one antecedently to this oath and covenant." And quotes the words of Mr. Philip Nye, before the House of Commons in England, when they were about to swear the covenant, viz. "This oath is such as I can truly say is worthy of us, yea of all these kingdoms, yea of all the kingdoms in the world: for it is a swearing fealty and allegiance to Christ the King of kings, &c."

The bond used in the Secession is also for substance a taking hold of Christ, of his covenant of promise, and of his word as our perfect and only rule of faith and practice. And Seceders in general concur in the views of covenanting, which we have stated. Mr. Adam Gibb says "The covenant of Grace, which is made with, and stands fast in Christ our glorious head, lays us under much further obligation to duty and service, than the covenant of Works, even while it stood in the first Adam. And our obligation to vow and pay our vows, to covenant and perform, or keep our covenants of duty and service to God in Christ, is yet more strengthened and furthered by our being under a fuller and clearer dispensation of the covenant of Grace, than these had who lived under the Old Testament, the dark legal dispensation of this covenant of Grace. How the obligation is strengthened, and what influence the covenant of Grace has upon our covenants of duty may appear in the following respects. The eighth of which is "In respect of the *authority* enjoining obedience, and calling us to devote ourselves and our service to the Lord.—While God is related to us as our God and Redeemer, we are laid under the strongest obligations to duty and obedience; according to the import of the preface to the ten commandments." Display, Vol. I. pages 217 and 219. This Author indeed calls the deed of the Church a covenant; but he considers it as founded on the Covenant of Grace; and calls it a *covenant of duty*, a covenant in which we avow and engage to perform our duty in adhering to the covenant of Grace. And speaking of covenanting in the same work (Vol. I. page 253) "it is in reality a proper and steadfast adherence to the unerring rule of faith and manners." The following is the definition of public religious covenanting, in the Testimony enacted by the General Associate Synod, 1804. "That public religious covenanting is the deed of a number of church mem-

bers, in which they jointly and publicly profess, to renounce all hope of life from the covenant of works; to take hold of the covenant of grace, and to devote themselves to the Lord; and in the strength of promised grace, engage faithfully to cleave to him, to hold fast his truths, to perform the various duties which they owe to God and man, in their respective stations and relations, and to strengthen one another's hands in the work of the Lord." To quote the numerous host of writers on this subject, who have appeared in the Secession, and whose views coincide with what we have stated, would tire the patience of the reader. I shall only mention a Sermon published by Dr. Young of Hawick, entitled, "The true Nature of Evangelical covenanting with God considered," the greater part of which is occupied in shewing that there can be no covenant between God and his church, but that which he himself has made, and ratified by the sacrifice of Christ, and offered to us in the gospel; and that all covenanting on our part consists in an acceptance of that covenant corresponding to the offer of it in the gospel.

NOTE B.—page 14.

In the Secession the Minister converses repeatedly with candidates for admission, to ascertain their knowledge of the gospel in general, and particularly of the public standards of the Associate body; and enquires of his own elders if there is nothing objectionable in the moral character of the candidates, or (if they have lately come from a distance) demands a certificate from the Minister or elders in their former place of residence. If he finds them deficient in knowledge or objectionable in point of character, they are kept back till the obstacle is removed. If neither of these is the case, he declares, generally on the Fast-day before the Sacrament, that he has found nothing objectionable to them, either in point of knowledge or character, and asks if they believe in the Scriptures, approve of the Confession of Faith and Testimony, will endeavour to show the holy tendency of the doctrines contained in them in their practice, will submit to the authority of the Session, in subordination to the Presbtery and Synod, and endeavour according to their ability and capacity, to be useful, as members of the congregation, in contributing to its funds, and exhorting the other members of it as brethren? This declaration is made, and these questions put before the Session, and in many places before the whole Congregation. The candidates having given suitable answers to the questions, are then declared members in full communion, admissible to all the privileges of the church, and dismissed with an exhortation to steadfastness, progress,

and perseverance in the religion of Jesus, of which they have made this public profession.

The questions are substantially the same in all congregations. But though we have a formula of questions, for the admission of Elders and Ministers, yet for the preservation of uniformity, a formula of questions, such as the above, regularly sanctioned by our Judicatories, and enjoined to be used in all congregations under their inspection, is still a desideratum in the Secession, which, it is hoped, will be supplied at the approaching Union.

NOTE C.—page 32.

The proposed Basis of the expected union cannot be quite correct in saying, we are under the strongest obligations," from what our reforming ancestors did. Surely it was not meant to deny that the obligation from the authority of God is stronger.

NOTE D.—page 40.

The following are the words of the act 1744, as published by Mr. Gibb in his Display of the Secession Testimony. The Presbytery agree that Covenanting " shall be the the term of Ministerial communion with this Presbytery : and likewise of Christian communion in the admission of people to sealing ordinances ; secluding therefrom all *opposers*, contemners, and slighers of the said renovation of our covenants. And moreover as the Presbetry judge that much tenderness and lenity is to be used with the weakest of Christ's flock, who are lying open to light, and minting to come forward in the said cause ; that they may not be, at first instance, secluded from sealing ordinances : so they agree that all such are to be secluded who after deliberate pains taken for their information with all due meekness and patience, shall be found neglecters and shifters of this important moral duty ; or not to be in the due use of means for light and satisfaction thereanent." See Display, Vol. 1. page 252.

As to the first clause making covenanting, or the actual public swearing of the bond a term of Ministerial communion, we know that different intervals of many years each have occurred when the operation of this was suspended, and many Students licensed to preach and Ministers ordained who had not sworn the bond ; and that at present, it has not been in operation for at least five or six years. I have heard of no in-

stance of covenanting or publicly swearing the bond since it was done at Mearns 1814; nor had it been done in any other Congregation for some years before that. It would be improper and impossible for me to mention the names of all who have been licensed and ordained without having taken the bond. If in some cases a promise has been required that the intrant to office would embrace the first opportunity of doing so, still a promise is not actually swearing the bond, and they who rested in that did not make covenanting a term of ministerial communion. If we are not greatly misinformed there are some who have been ministers and members of the General Associate Synod for upwards of twenty years and have not yet publicly sworn the bond.

As to the latter part of the act which makes covenanting a term of Christian communion, you will see that according to the last clause people could be admitted and continued in communion if they said they were in the use of means for light on the subject. So that in effect it excludes them only who are opposers of the duty altogether. Mr. Gibb subjoins a note at the bottom of the page in which he tells us that for thirty years after this act was passed he had not known any of the people kept back from sealing ordinances for not joining in covenanting work, but that they had always been waited for till willingly offering themselves. And if it was so for the first thirty, we know that this act has never been interpreted in succeeding years so as to make actual covenanting a term of communion; and that it has been superseded by other acts on that subject which say nothing of secluding neglecters and shifters.

This shows that if both the large branches of the Secession at present agree in asserting that public religious vowing or covenanting is a moral duty to be performed when circumstances require, they ought not to remain separate or delay the intended conjunction because they are not agreed in saying that our present circumstances in providence call for the performance of it. All the members of the General Associate Synod are not agreed in that. And to speak of making the performing of it a term of communion, would be to make a new term of communion in the Secession, a term which would not only exclude many of those called Burghers, but also throw out at least three fourths of the Antiburghers.



